

Research and Practice Notes / Notes sur la recherche et les méthodes

Exploring the Leadership Dimension of Developmental Evaluation: The Evaluator as a Servant-Leader

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Abstract: *Evaluators working on a developmental evaluation are expected to work collaboratively with program developers to marshal evaluation in ways that support ongoing program development and adaptation. This expectation introduces novel challenges to evaluation practice and exposes the evaluator to the treacherous waters of program complexities that are likely unique to each developmental evaluation. What may have become accepted norms about evaluator roles, responsibilities, and evaluator-client relationships may no longer hold true in the course of repurposing evaluation for program development. Early writers on developmental evaluation have suggested that evaluators incorporate elements of servant leadership to help navigate the situational challenges associated with developmental evaluation. This Practice Note extends current dialogue on servant leadership as it is situated in developmental evaluation by contributing a discussion on the utility of servant leadership in guiding developmental evaluator behaviour and decision-making.*

Keywords: *developmental evaluation, ethics, evaluation use, program development, research on evaluation, servant leadership*

Résumé : *On s'attend à ce que les professionnels de l'évaluation évolutive collaborent avec les concepteurs de programmes pour bâtir une évaluation qui appuie le développement et l'adaptation continus du programme. Cette attente apporte de nouveaux défis à la pratique de l'évaluation et expose l'évaluateur aux complexités d'un programme qui risquent de s'avérer uniques à chaque évaluation évolutive. Ce qui avait sans doute été la norme concernant les rôles et les responsabilités de l'évaluateur ainsi que la relation évaluateur-client n'est peut-être plus accepté lorsqu'il s'agit de la réaffectation de l'évaluation en fonction du développement des programmes. Les premiers auteurs à se pencher sur l'évaluation évolutive ont proposé aux évaluateurs d'incorporer des éléments du leadership-serviteur pour guider le comportement et le processus décisionnel de l'évaluateur évolutif. Cet avis de pratique continue le*

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dialogue actuel sur le leadership-serviteur, tel qu'il est situé dans l'évaluation évolutive, en y contribuant une discussion sur l'utilité du leadership-serviteur à guider le comportement et la prise de décision de l'évaluateur évolutif.

Mots clés : *évaluation évolutive, éthique, utilisation de l'évaluation, développement de programme, recherche en matière d'évaluation, leadership-serviteur*

Developmental evaluation is a novel approach to conducting evaluation for supporting program development (Dozois, Langlois, & Blanchet-Cohen, 2010; Gamble, 2008; Patton, 2011). Under this approach, both program activities and outcomes are expected to evolve even as the program is being implemented and evaluated. Evaluating a program in this way is possible and even advisable because the knowledge and information that can be generated from evaluating developmentally are of a different kind than those of formative or summative evaluation. Developmental evaluation supports purposeful changes to a program by infusing evaluative data into decision-making and program management processes (Patton, 2011).

In contrast to formative or summative evaluation, developmental evaluation relaxes certain restrictions that are to be met for a program to be evaluated. During a developmental evaluation, it is not necessary for a program to be rigidly implemented as originally planned (program fidelity), goals to be prespecified and locked-in, or program activities to be unchanged (stability in program logics). Rather, developmental evaluation assumes that action must be taken, despite limited knowledge at the outset, for program developers and evaluators to learn and adapt the program in more meaningful and purposeful ways. Nonetheless, these relaxed expectations should not be seen as an excuse for inadequate planning, sloppy design, or poor execution. Approaching evaluation developmentally, therefore, helps generate feedback that permits program decision-makers to adapt the program according to emerging findings (Patton, 1994, 2011). For these reasons, developmental evaluation is particularly appealing to those program developers whose programs operate in fast-changing situations (e.g., rapid response in an emergency), where there may be limited knowledge of what works (e.g., a novel problem), and where the underlying social problem is complex and difficult to resolve (e.g., problems that demand innovative program solutions, such as poverty and aging) (Patton, 2011; Preskill & Beer, 2012). Developmental evaluation thus presents to evaluators and program decision-makers a compelling alternative for grounding program decisions in evaluation.

In practice, however, conducting a developmental evaluation can be immensely challenging, as different program situations demand unique and varied responses from the evaluator. To tailor a developmental evaluation to the needs of the program and its staff, the developmental evaluator is asked to work collaboratively with clients to identify ways in which evaluative inquiry might help inform program decision-making (Lam & Shulha, 2014; Patton, 2011). And

because an evaluator may become involved in a developmental evaluation during the early stages of a program, the evaluator may become privy to deliberations and decisions concerning the program's eventual design. Although design responsibility ultimately rests with the program developers, a question arises: What are evaluators to do should they suspect the program-as-designed to be ineffectual? Is it incumbent upon the evaluator to raise the issue and, if so, how? These frontiers of practice present novel challenges requiring the evaluator to exercise careful and prudent decision-making when leading a developmental evaluation.

As the field of evaluation begins to grapple with developmental evaluation and more clients begin to contract out developmental evaluation services, it is critical that evaluators be able to draw upon principles of practice that enact the tenets of developmental evaluation theory. Accordingly, early writers on developmental evaluation have suggested that evaluators incorporate the leadership approach—servant leadership—to capture the unique leadership demands placed upon developmental evaluators:

An element of leadership is involved in developmental evaluation because the developmental evaluator is actively helping to shape the initiative. *How* that's done makes a world of difference to the effectiveness of their work. ... A [developmental evaluator] whose first orientation is to serve has a far better chance of helping an initiative more effectively get past its "knots" as a learning organization. (Dozois et al., 2010, pp. 23–24)

What distinguishes servant leadership from other dominant leadership orientations is the exercise of leadership, not to advance the leader's own agenda or interests but to advance those of the leader's followers (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). Servant-leaders act in service of their followers, enabling them to achieve their goals and aspirations.

The claim for applying servant leadership to developmental evaluation remains unexamined both theoretically and empirically, with the notable exception of Langlois, Blanchet-Cohen, and Beer's (2013) publication, titled "The Art of the Nudge: Five Practices for Developmental Evaluators." Few evaluation theorists have explicitly linked leadership literature to evaluation practice. This Research and Practice Note responds to this gap by contributing a discussion on the utility of *servant leadership* in guiding developmental evaluator behaviour and decision-making with the aim of inviting evaluation researchers and theorists to further examine its applicability to practice. The purpose of this article is twofold: (a) to situate servant leadership theory in developmental evaluation literature, and (b) to illustrate how issues that arose in a case of developmental evaluation could be resolved by turning to servant leadership. This article draws upon a recent case study on a developmental evaluation (Lam & Shulha, 2014) and analyzes the contribution of servant leadership to the preformative development of an innovative educational program.

LEADERSHIP AND EVALUATION

Leadership in Evaluation

The leadership task before the contemporary evaluator is to lead and engage evaluation stakeholders in designing and implementing an evaluation that satisfies the warrants of the field (e.g., [Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011](#)); mismanagement of stakeholder relationships risks jeopardizing the utility, propriety, and accuracy of an evaluation. I might go so far as to suggest that the “leadership turn” in evaluation may have occurred as early as when evaluators were encouraged to move beyond being technocrats into responding to stakeholder concerns (e.g., [Guba & Lincoln, 1989](#); [Stake, 1985](#)). No longer was it advisable for evaluators to evaluate programs in isolation. This in turn prompted reconceptualizations of evaluator roles and behaviour (e.g., [Skolits, Morrow, & Burr, 2009](#)) and surfaced additional dimensions of practice.

In conducting an evaluation, the evaluator leverages leadership to achieve specific ends. For instance, utilization-focused evaluation implores evaluators to first identify, then centre, evaluation utilization issues throughout all phases of an evaluation by focusing on the evaluation’s primary uses for its primary intended users ([Patton, 2008](#)). In leadership terms, the evaluator—as a leader—is expected to exercise influence over primary intended users to promote the use of evaluation ([Patton, 2008](#)). This is made evident in discussions of the “personal factor” in utilization-focused evaluation theory ([Patton, 2008](#)), which encourages evaluators to attend to the personal influences they wield over the course of an evaluation. Expectations of evaluator leadership are also evident in participatory and collaborative approaches to evaluation, responsive evaluation, theory-driven evaluation, and empowerment evaluation, among others. It appears that in the six decades of theoretical advancement in evaluation practice, leadership issues have largely been considered and resolved in isolation from leadership theory. However, with developmental evaluation, where roles, responsibilities, and evaluator-client relationships are inherently fluid and dynamic, grounding evaluator behaviours and decision-making in the robust scholarship of leadership theory might provide practitioners some much-needed guidance and traction until developmental evaluation theory is sufficiently developed. One area of leadership theory that may be particular instructive to developmental evaluators is servant leadership.

Servant Leadership

The modern servant leadership movement was pioneered by Robert Greenleaf (1904–1990), who first coined the phrase in the 1970s. Displeased with the then-prevailing discourse of leadership centred on self-interest and followership, Greenleaf sought a new conception along the lines of ethics, care, and service. “The servant-leader is servant first ... it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead” (Greenleaf, 1977/[2002](#), p. 27). Compared to more traditional approaches of

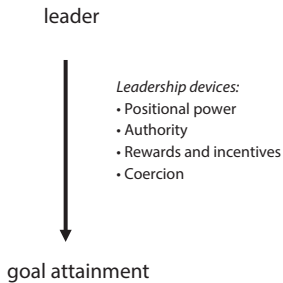
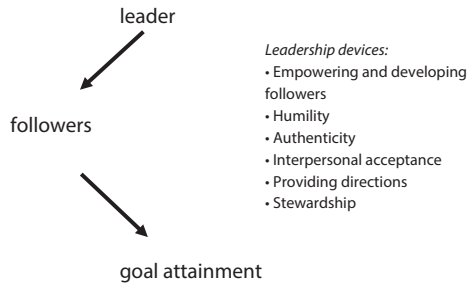
Conventional Leadership**Servant Leadership**

Figure 1. Differing theories of change toward goal attainment under conventional approaches to leadership and servant leadership.

leadership, servant leadership suggests that the path toward achieving a common goal is through service to followers, not positional-authority, rewards, coercion, or punishment (Blanchard, 1995; Greenleaf, 1977/2002). These opposing theories of change are illustrated graphically in Figure 1.

Possessing a service orientation is the defining characteristic of servant leaders. In attending to the needs of their followers, leaders balance their followers' concerns with those important to the success of the organization, group, or community (Graham, 1991). Leaders must first consider what is right for those whom they serve, then act to that effect. Change comes through satisfying the kinds of needs that effective leadership can meet as well as through paying close attention to the relational dynamics between servant-leaders and followers. On the use of power in servant leadership, van Dierendonck (2011) observed that "power becomes a possibility to serve others and as such may even be considered a prerequisite for servant-leaders. Serving and leading become almost exchangeable. Being a servant allows a person to lead; being a leader implies a person serves" (p. 1231). van Dierendonck (2011) further offered a clarifying point:

Working from a need to serve does not imply an attitude of servility in the sense that the power lies in the hands of the followers or that leaders would have low self-esteem ... In view of its focus on values, it is not only in the behaviour that servant leadership can be distinguished from other leadership styles but also in the general attitude toward the people in an organization and in the motivation to be a leader. (p. 1231)

Early discussions of servant leadership theory largely consisted of aspirational prose preaching the virtues of its approach; this presented enormous challenges to both theorists and researchers interested in conducting inquiry on it (see Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999). In recent years, spurred in part by a renewed focus on leadership ethics, leadership scholars have sought to operationalize the different dimensions of servant leadership. For instance, Farling et al. (1999) constructed

a servant leadership model consisting of five factors: vision, influence, credibility, trust, and service. In their model, servant leadership is advanced through these five stages sequentially in an upward spiraling maturation process. Similarly, [Barbuto and Wheeler \(2006\)](#) proposed a model of servant leadership comprising altruistic calling, emotional healing, persuasive mapping, wisdom, and organizational stewardship. [Dennis and Bocarnea \(2005\)](#) developed a servant leadership instrument intended to measure [Patterson's \(2003\)](#) proposed constructs of servant leadership. Of the seven factors proposed—agape love (i.e., love in the social, moral sense), acts of humility, altruism, being a visionary, trusting, serving, and empowering followers—all but two factors (serving and altruism) had sufficient measurement reliability.

Most recently, [van Dierendonck \(2011\)](#) conducted a comprehensive review and synthesis of the literature and advanced six characteristics of servant-leader behaviours:

1. *Empowering and developing people* in ways that “foster a proactive, self-confident attitude among followers and give them a sense of personal power” (p. 1232).
2. *Humility* to position one's own achievement in proper perspective. The leader welcomes contributions and acknowledges others' expertise in achieving the common goal.
3. *Authenticity* to represent oneself and to act in ways consistent with one's own belief and value system as a servant-leader. Authenticity “manifests itself in various aspects: doing what is promised, visibility within the organization, honesty ([Russell & Stone, 2002](#)), and vulnerability ([Luthans & Avolio, 2003](#))” (p. 1233).
4. *Interpersonal acceptance* refers to “the ability to understand and experience the feelings of others and where people are coming from and the ability to let go of perceived wrongdoings and not carry a grudge into other situations” (p. 1234).
5. *Providing directions* to scaffold and tailor a task in ways that enable one's followers to succeed. Servant-leaders impose a sense of accountability on those whom they lead.
6. *Stewardship* is the “willingness to take responsibility for the larger institution and to go for service instead of control and self-interest” (p. 1234).

Among leadership literature, [van Dierendonck's \(2011\)](#) framework is likely the most comprehensive and contemporary rendition of servant leadership theory. For that reason, the present Research and Practice Note will reference his framework as a basis for discussing servant leadership. Particularly, his presentation of the six characteristics provides a meaningful framework against which issues drawn from a developmental evaluation can be interpreted. In doing so, we may begin to see how principles of servant leadership can serve to clarify developmental evaluation practice.

METHODS

To illustrate how servant leadership aids in resolving the complexities of developmental evaluation, this article draws on and extends an empirical case study conducted on a developmental evaluation (Lam & Shulha, 2014). This particular developmental evaluation was conducted at one preservice teacher education program in Ontario. There, two instructors sought to overcome program constraints by rethinking how they could reorganize their educational program to better prepare teacher candidates for assessing student learning in the classroom. They suspected that some form of web-based educational technology could help with their predicament by mitigating the impersonal nature of learning associated with lectures delivered in a compressed timeline. The instructional team, however, lacked a comprehensive understanding of which educational technologies might be most powerful in this context and, more specifically, what particular meaning or promise any one of the available technologies might hold for enhancing teacher learning. The instructional team thus invited the author of this article to serve as the developmental evaluator to assist this exploration. A year before the developmental evaluation, I had worked with the instructional team as a teaching assistant. That experience sensitized me to the clients' challenges and provided an understanding that an external consultant would not have had. In this case, the existing relationship amounted to trust that helped me establish credibility with the clients.

A retrospective case study was conducted to unpack the developmental evaluation (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). The purpose of the case study was to analyze the means by which a program came to be developed, using developmental evaluation in relation to evaluator behaviour and decision-making. Qualitative methodology was used to produce rich, detailed, thick descriptions of people and places (Geertz, 1973) and to solicit interpretations of the experiences of clients (Patton, 2002) participating in the developmental evaluation. The case study spanned an 11-month period from May 2010 to April 2011. All three of the evaluation clients—two professors of education and their lead teaching assistant—participated in this study voluntarily and granted unrestricted access to all sources of data. This research was granted ethical approval by the institutional research ethics board at the author's university. For further elaboration on the methods of this study, please see Lam and Shulha (2014).

Data Sources

The data analyzed consisted of transcribed audio recordings from all nine program development meetings (approximately 15+ hours), all e-mail correspondence between the development team and the developmental evaluator, program artifacts (e.g., program literature and interim evaluation reports), and other internal developmental records (e.g., observational field notes and meeting notes) collected from the initial developmental evaluation.

These records were initially created and archived as part of the original developmental evaluation efforts, and they constitute the full scope of data

representative of the case. The audio recordings of program development meetings were rich sources of data, capturing the unfolding conversations and decision-making taking place between the clients and the developmental evaluator. Program artifacts were used to anchor and validate the interpretation of program development processes. These two sources of data detailed the program development process as well as the developed program. Finally, the audio recordings and program artifacts were triangulated against interview data gathered via 45-minute semistructured interviews with all three clients. The purpose of conducting interviews was to collect post-hoc evidence on the significance of the developmental evaluation and to capture insights arising from engagement in the evaluation process. To identify episodes relevant to the present discussion, I reanalyzed the data and selected illustrative developmental evaluation episodes where theory did not provide clear prescription, thus requiring independent judgment-making. Episodes of particular interest were those situations where meaning could be interpreted differently under conventional and servant leadership orientations. These episodes were then interpreted against [van Dierendonck's \(2011\)](#) framework to illustrate how servant leadership might be particularly salient in guiding evaluator decision-making and behaviour.

LESSONS LEARNED

Central to the analyzed developmental evaluation was the expectation that the developmental evaluator would support his clients' learning about the potentials of technology for enacting a program of instruction in classroom assessment for teacher candidates. The clients, themselves subject matter experts, welcomed the evaluator's expertise with educational technologies as well as his expertise in thinking about program development. This mutual recognition of expertise fostered true collaboration when it came to making decisions about the program. In this way, the program could be seen as a cocreation between the evaluator and the clients.

Exercising servant leadership was central in enacting a developmental evaluation process that (a) helped the clients learn about the potentials of various technologies, (b) focused on one particular technology for further exploration with volunteers, (c) mounted a pilot program, and (d) generated emergent learning about successes and challenges. (For specific details concerning how developmental evaluation enabled an innovative response to program development, see [Lam & Shulha, 2014](#)). In particular, four episodes within the developmental evaluation illustrate the value of adopting a servant leadership orientation: (a) negotiating decision-making power over program development, (b) helping vs. rescuing, (c) justifying and sustaining inquiry, and (d) client-centred evaluator decision-making.

Issue 1: Negotiating Decision-Making Power over Program Development

In a developmental evaluation, the evaluator is expected to collaborate with the program team to shape the eventual course of the program under development

(Dozois et al., 2010; Patton, 2011). In practice, however, the extent to which an evaluator is able to shape the course of program development is limited by the amount of power and control given by the program team; a program team can flat-out reject an evaluator's contribution. Therefore, the question is—does not having any control over program decision-making undermine the very task a developmental evaluator has been contracted to perform? If so, how does an evaluator then contribute to program development in the absence of any power or control over decision-making? Evaluators looking to conduct a developmental evaluation are likely to find themselves struggling to navigate the fuzzy boundary between program development and evaluation.

Early in this particular evaluation, the issue of decision-making came up over the choice of which educational technology to adopt. The clients had sought my support in evaluating available technologies, yet they had also made very explicit their desire to make the final decisions about the forthcoming program. They were not suggesting that we jointly share decision-making, but that they have the final say. I had expected my clients to act on well-reasoned recommendations that I constructed regarding the choice of technology. However, they reasoned that they were uniquely qualified to judge the appropriateness of a particular technology for promoting their students' learning. I was initially taken aback by this seeming encroachment on what I saw as my professional responsibility as an evaluator. Should not the choice of technology follow logically from the careful evaluation of available technologies and their features against the needs of the clients? If my clients were to reject my recommendation, what was I to do?

In assuming joint leadership over program development, interpreting this exchange through a conventional leadership frame would suggest the relinquishing of control as negative. Reframing the exchange through the servant leadership orientation prompted a different interpretation. Specifically, by practicing impersonal acceptance (Characteristic 4: Interpersonal acceptance) I sought to understand my clients' deep sense of responsibility over both the probable success and the potential failure associated with innovative program development. Reframing this encounter helped me realize the importance of trust and relationship-building in a developmental evaluation, engendered by: soliciting clients' needs, mounting inquiry, facilitating sense-making around collected data, and buttressing decision-making with evidence. In beginning a developmental evaluation, evaluators may wish to consider the extent to which control over program decision-making is realistic, possible, and necessary; they may also wish to consider the extent to which clients may be ready to incorporate a developmental evaluator's input. In the absence of control over program decision-making, developmental evaluators should appeal to program decision-makers through logic, persuasion, and evidence.

Issue 2. Helping vs. Rescuing

In a developmental evaluation, it can be difficult to determine how much support to reasonably or realistically provide the clients. The program situation is often fast-changing, and many of the program implications are unknown at the outset.

These dynamics set up a conundrum where the developmental evaluator must decide (likely in consultation with the clients) the extent of support and guidance that would be reasonable for or expected of the developmental evaluator.

In the developmental evaluation studied, I had to wrestle with how much support and coaching to provide my clients around exploring the potential of educational technology. Any extended support and coaching inevitably slows down program development progress and demands more of the evaluator's time. It was tempting to conclude the developmental inquiry and recommend that one particular technology be adopted, not unlike how an evaluator or consultant might be contracted to perform a feasibility study to determine the "correct" choice of technology.

However, upon reflecting on principles of servant leadership, I came away with an alternative course of action. Simply rendering a recommendation following a feasibility study would have jeopardized the learning that clients could gain from working with the technology (Characteristic 1: Empowering and developing people). Adopting a servant leadership orientation prompted me to explore my clients' expressed and implicit needs, which meant developing their facility with educational technologies so that they could be proficient at adapting the program. To do so, I organized learning activities and coached them through using the various technologies. I facilitated an exercise to help them consider how different technologies might be adapted for the purposes of learning classroom assessment (Characteristic 5: Providing directions). I also structured the conversation and infused evaluative thinking into the discussion.

The servant-leader orientation emphasized this developmental evaluator's role as a change agent in the service of his clients. It was less a matter of advancing my goal of finishing the contract for which I was brought in, and more a matter of developing my clients' capacity in matters of program development.

In leading developmental evaluations, evaluators may wish to consider that their involvement is only temporary. Under the servant leadership orientation, it becomes paramount for the evaluator to develop clients' capacity in matters of evaluation, conceptualizing the program, and engaging with the social issues being tackled by the clients. Evaluators' exposure to many programs is likely to have taught them some patterns of program effectiveness that they may wish to share with their clients. Patton (1994) dubbed this the grey-head effect. Drawing on this knowledge can help ease clients' efforts. Furthermore, developmental evaluators who have expertise in the substantive areas over issues with which clients wrestle will enhance the impact of the developmental evaluation. In this case, my substantive expertise in educational technology likely helped frame the inquiry and clients' learning in more meaningful ways.

Issue 3. Justifying and Sustaining Prolonged Engagement with Clients

In the process of becoming a collaborator in program development, the issue of what constitutes responsible engagement with clients arises. Given an unrestricted

budget and the luxury of time, most evaluators would be happy to work intensively with a program and its staff to lend support and expertise where possible. Alas, such opportunities are rare. Most evaluators are likely to find themselves juggling multiple projects. They are under pressure to run their practice as efficiently as possible. For some evaluators entering into a developmental evaluation, the dynamics and demands of the developmental evaluation may come as a surprise. They might question—how intensive a collaborator ought an evaluator be? What state should a program be in for a developmental evaluator to responsibly exit the intervention?

Under a conventional leadership framing, efficiency is emphasized as a positive attribute. The evaluator as a leader is therefore expected to maximize output in the least amount of time. Prolonging engagement more than absolutely necessary is undesirable. Adopting a servant leadership orientation offers an alternative course of action. Particularly, stewardship (Characteristic 6: Stewardship) provides the justification for sustaining the prolonged engagement necessary for promoting utility from a developmental evaluation.

Assuming stewardship compels the developmental evaluator to develop a deep sense of the complexities surrounding the problem and situation. In the developmental evaluation, I wrestled with this very issue. Adopting a stewardship mentality prompted me to approach the inquiry differently. I sought to explore the following concerns as deeply as possible:

- What were the clients conceptualizing to be the problem(s) they wish to resolve?
- What solutions might this initial problem-framing call for?
- What inquiry could I structure or facilitate for us to learn more about this problem and potential solutions?
- What other factors or considerations ought to be considered in conceptualizing the problem?
- Could the problem be reframed differently? What insights might we gain from this?

Pursuing these lines of inquiry prompted a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the problem and potential solutions. They allowed me to develop sensitivities around the problem and a deep sense of the complexity facing the clients to inform the emerging developmental evaluation inquiry by assuming stewardship (but not necessarily ownership) over the problem. I came to understand that clients may already be bewildered by the complexity facing them; as such, a developmental evaluator can help by elucidating the processes of innovation (Patton, 2011).

To facilitate stewardship, it is important that the developmental evaluator be self-reflexive about his or her abilities as well as genuine (Characteristic 3: Authenticity) in representing expertise. This is important because developmental evaluation is often conducted in complex program situations where certainty is

rare and evaluators cannot know it all. Even when an evaluator holds expertise in some area, what may hold true in other contexts might not be true in the particular program contexts for which a program is being developed. In a reciprocal fashion, it is vital for clients to accept that the evaluator (as a consultant) does not need to have the answers to all the questions but rather the means through which to generate insights. A useful characterization of this notion is for the developmental evaluator to become a colearner.

Issue 4. Client-centred Evaluator Decision-Making

And finally, perhaps the most valuable lesson learned from adopting a servant leadership orientation is how the general attitude of servitude gives rise to a more client-centred than evaluator-centred approach in evaluator decision-making. Although centring evaluation concerns on the client is not unique to developmental evaluation, the importance of this focus is heightened as client-centredness ought to crosscut all aspects of developmental evaluator behaviour and decision-making.

The case study revealed points of tension where the interests of the evaluator could have been at odds with the needs of the clients. For instance, recommending a more prescriptive action plan to the clients might have absolved the need for prolonged client engagement. For the “gig-driven” consultant, a quick entry-and-exit might be the profit-maximizing (i.e., rational) course of action. Adopting a servant leadership orientation, however, would urge the evaluator to focus on his clients’ needs first.

The developmental evaluation could have been complicated were the success of the developmental evaluation to be hinged upon other rewards, say, the need to demonstrate positive outcomes to external funding bodies or to have positive findings for publication. This pressure could lead the evaluator (or the clients) to pursue a conservative course of action, which might limit the potential for innovative exploration. Adopting a servitude orientation would prompt the evaluator to focus on and privilege the needs of program users and program staff. Furthermore, because the evaluator might be the first to notice any unintended consequences, there would exist a moral obligation to direct the clients’ attention to these deviations to make a collective, informed judgment agreeable to all. For instance, teacher candidates initially found Twitter disorienting and confusing, as would a child trying a new sport or starting a new hobby. But such discomfort may be necessary and part-and-parcel of mastery. The developmental evaluator is central in facilitating sense-making amidst uncertainty. In this case, extending the notion of servitude to those whom the program serves (beyond the immediate evaluation clients) is crucial in promoting meaningful program development.

To evaluators entering into a developmental evaluation, striking a balance between what ought to be appropriate from an evaluation standpoint and what ought to be appropriate in a client-centred approach may be essential for mounting a developmental evaluation that promotes program development. This can be an uncomfortable stance, as evaluators are taught to respect closely the

methodological warrants or norms of practice. However, in the interest of advancing program development and ultimately acting in the service of program users, a degree of leeway might be needed to privilege and prioritize the needs of clients.

PRACTICAL AND SCHOLARLY SIGNIFICANCE

In this article, I examined the basic principles of servant leadership and their implications on developmental evaluation. Servant leadership theory explains an approach to leadership that is grounded in servitude. Grounding evaluator behaviour in servant leadership may help navigate the ambiguity associated with supporting program development. I then drew on a recent developmental evaluation and identified issues where a servant leadership orientation helped reframe evaluator behaviour and decision-making. In doing so, I identified four implications for practice that are grounded in servant leadership that others may wish to consider:

1. Seek to understand your clients' predicament. Consider the extent to which control over program decision-making is realistic, possible, and necessary, and the extent to which clients may be ready to incorporate a developmental evaluator's input. In the absence of control over program decision-making, appeal to program decision-makers through logic, persuasion, and evidence.
2. Develop your clients' capacity in matters of evaluation, conceptualizing the program and engaging with the problem being tackled by the clients through learning and inquiry.
3. Develop sensitivities around the problem as well as a deep sense of the complexity facing the clients to inform the emerging developmental evaluation inquiry by assuming stewardship (but not necessarily ownership) over the problem. Clients may already be bewildered by the complexity facing them; a developmental evaluator can help by elucidating the processes of innovation ([Patton, 2011](#)).
4. Strike a balance between what ought to be appropriate from an evaluation standpoint and what ought to be appropriate for clients as an important step toward mounting a developmental evaluation that promotes program development.

In closing, servant leadership theory offers evaluators a way to clarify what developmental evaluators might do in ambiguous situations. With this Practice Note, it was my intention to invite evaluators to consider the utility of servant leadership in guiding developmental evaluation practice. Developing a sound theoretical base about how leadership corresponds with evaluation is critical for informing evaluation practice. Generally, I also invite other evaluators to consider what valence the substantial body of literature on leadership might hold for evaluators, the practices of evaluation, and the difference we aspire to make in service of others.

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